



Part 1: News Analysis

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In the most important change in defense policy since taking office, President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov announced that a new military doctrine will be drafted, with reduction of both the numbers of soldiers and their time of service. University students will now serve 12 months instead of 18, contract personnel are to replace some soldiers, and modern equipment will further eliminate military jobs. The downsizing of the armed forces is to be accompanied by improved living conditions and equipment for troops. Modernization of the army is seen as strengthening Turkmenistan's defense: "People who cannot maintain their own army, will have to maintain someone else's," said the president, quoting a Turkmen proverb. To reinforce the need for change, two military officials were reprimanded for poor supply of recruits and inadequate maintenance of border stations, and immediate construction of new installations was ordered.

Another visible sign of change in Turkmenistan, RFE/RL reported, is the removal of portraits of past leader Saparmurat Niyazov from the walls of official buildings and television broadcasts. A Turkmen government official confirmed that Berdymukhamedov has ordered the removal of all portraits of Niyazov. Yet critics are concerned that a new personality cult could be emerging, and that the president is enjoying foreign praise for the most modest of modifications. Portraits of Berdymukhamedov are steadily replacing those of Niyazov, although the current Turkmen leader insists his picture be hung only on the inside of buildings rather than the outside.

Other visible features of authoritarian rule remain, particularly strong-arm tactics used on opponents and subordinates with little indication of their offenses. Numerous heads have rolled under the new Turkmen dispensation, sometimes because bureaucrats were too visibly associated with the past regime, sometimes to evoke change by shuffling personnel. This week, the prosecutor general and Supreme Court chairman were publicly fired on television and rebuked for unspecified abuses of office, and the national security minister was reprimanded for poor selection and training of personnel, along with his Mary district chief.

In a stark reminder of the continued presence of political prisoners and imprisoned officials fallen from favor, Amnesty International reported this week that Niyazov's lawful successor, former Speaker of Parliament Ovezgeldy Atayev, along with his wife, remained in prison, as did the influential former chief of Niyazov's presidential security service. Those charged in connection with an alleged assassination plot in 2002 still remain incommunicado.

While keeping up an intense schedule of foreign diplomacy – the Turkmen leader plans to travel to Uzbekistan next week for a summit with his counterpart – Berdymukhamedov has increasingly turned attention to domestic reforms. A US \$4 billion program to improve the plight of Turkmenistan's impoverished villages is now under way. As the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) has learned recently, the challenge is staggering: many rural areas lacking running water and electricity while suffering rampant disease and malnutrition. While the president magnanimously dispensed with a gift of US \$10 for every Turkmen woman to celebrate International Women's Day, maternal and infant mortality in Turkmenistan remain among the highest in the world.

State television got an injection of US \$2.7 million of modern equipment, even though what reporting exists on the realities of Turkmenistan is still being done by foreign media, international human rights groups, emigres, and the opposition.

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1. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

a. US Urges Turkmenistan to Diversify Gas Exports

Source: Reuters/02/29/08. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Electronic version: <http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssEnergyNews/idUSL2976160520080229>

Synopsis: In a meeting with President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov on February 28, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Steven Mann urged Turkmenistan to find routes other than Russia for its natural gas exports, Reuters reported. Amb. Mann said that the Nabucco pipeline project bypassing Russia is a "viable option" for Turkmenistan.

"We believe it is highly desirable for Turkmenistan to have alternative export possibilities, and Nabucco might be one of those," Amb. Mann was quoted as saying, adding that Nabucco is "progressing very well." Last week Russian President Vladimir Putin called the Nabucco project "a waste of money" that was losing out to a rival Russian project, South Stream, Reuters reported.

"Right now Gazprom dominates imports from the East and many Europeans have told us that they would like to see more competition, not less competition," said Amb. Mann. He indicated that another pipeline being contemplated through Afghanistan had not generated any real commercial interest.

The US energy envoy also said that Turkmenistan has not had effective development of its reserves since independence, and needed to increase its output. He said that the president's recent ordering of an independent audit of reserves was an important step to bringing in major international firms as investors.

b. OSCE Assisting Turkmenistan to Fight Money Laundering, Terrorism

Source: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)/OSCE Centre in Ashgabat/03/05/08.

Electronic version: http://www.osce.org/ashgabat/item_1_30001.html

Supporting the efforts of Turkmenistan to fight money laundering and the financing of terrorism was the aim of a workshop that ended in Ashgabat today. The two-day event was organized by the OSCE, the World Bank, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the International Monetary Fund, and the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism.

The workshop helped train officials from various government bodies on international standards in building an effective system to fight money laundering and terrorism financing. It was also designed to help national officials implement best practices in Turkmenistan to protect its population, meet its international obligations and contribute to the global fight against money laundering and financing of terrorism.

"A single country alone is not capable of fighting money laundering and terrorism financing," said Ambassador Ibrahim Djikic, the Head of the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat. "In our globalized world, borders are not an obstacle for organized crime groups and terrorists. Only coordinated actions by law enforcement agencies of different countries, and assistance from the private and financial sectors can do the job."

He added that the OSCE was ready to offer necessary assistance to the government of Turkmenistan to help develop the necessary legislation, mechanisms and procedures to be able to identify suspicious transactions and report them to the authorities. Participants noted that developing financial intelligence units in Turkmenistan to collect, analyze and processes confidential financial information, was key to preventing money laundering and the financing of terrorism on the national and international levels. Today, such financial units exist in more than 100 countries. Turkmen officials found out more about the work of such financial units from experts from Belarus, Italy, Russia, Slovenia and the United States who shared their experiences in the field.

In December 2007, Turkmenistan became an observer of the Eurasian Group on Combating Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism. This was an important step in getting involved in global efforts to fight money laundering and terrorism financing. Turkmenistan is in the process of drafting a new law to improve its national efforts to fight organized criminal activity and more effectively contribute to the global fight against money laundering and terrorist financing.

c. Turkmen-Azerbaijani Commission Meets in Baku

Original title: Turkmen-Azerbaijani Cooperation Commission Meeting in Baku

Source: turkmenistan.ru/03/0/. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project. .

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12295&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: The second meeting of the Turkmen-Azerbaijani commission for economic cooperation was held in Baku March 4, turkmenistan.ru reported. Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Hydyr Saparliyev, Deputy Prime Minister and co-chairman of the commission, travelled to Baku for the meeting.

At a government meeting on March 3 to discuss the Turkmen-Azerbaijani commission's work, President Berdymukhamedov said the income from the repayment of Azerbaijan's debt to Turkmenistan would be spent on educational reforms and purchase of computers and multimedia equipment.

2. DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENTS

a. Past Turkmen Dictator's Personality Cult Being Dismantled

Original title: *Turkmenistan: Take Down the Portraits! Niyazov's Personality Cult Being Dismantled*

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty/02/27/08. Copyright (c) 2008. RFE/RL, Inc. Reprinted with the permission of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 1201 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Washington DC 20036.

Full version: <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/02/46828b63-1d30-4c53-a031-8061105193a3.html>

[Passages omitted: on cult of personality of past dictator Sapamurat Niyazov, and his image appearing on gold-plated statues, banknotes, food, and vodka, and on a Central Asian rule of thumb: the more authoritarian a leader, the more portraits on buildings.]

Niyazov often said he did not want to have his pictures and statues in the streets but it was "what the people wanted." He added: "If I were a worker and my president gave me all the things they have here [for free] in Turkmenistan, I would not only paint his picture, I would have his picture on my shoulder or on my clothing."

But it seems that many of the Niyazov portraits have now been removed, as Berdymukhamedov slowly moves to deconstruct Niyazov's cult of personality. "I don't see Niyazov's portraits anymore," Rahim Esenov, a prominent writer in Ashgabat, told RFE/RL's Turkmen Service. "In a clinic where I usually go, his pictures used to cover all the walls completely. Now, they are gone. However, you can still see his busts and statues on the streets."

A source close to the Turkmen government told RFE/RL on condition of anonymity that all government and public institutions have been instructed to remove Niyazov's portraits as well as boards containing excerpts from Niyazov's speeches and his book "Rukhnama," which had become a force-fed "spiritual guide to the Turkmen nation."

According to the instruction -- which is said to have come directly from Berdymukhamedov -- no portraits should be hung on buildings. Portraits of Berdymukhamedov could replace those of Niyazov but only inside government offices, a source told RFE/RL.

[Passages omitted: On work still to be done to dismantle Niyazov cult, as pictures of his face appear on banknotes, and many statues of him and his mother still appear.]

Meanwhile, observers have voiced concern over a possible cult of personality being established by Berdymukhamedov himself. In recent months, numerous reports from Turkmenistan have said that portraits of Berdymukhamedov are replacing those of Niyazov in many places around the capital and elsewhere.

A correspondent for RFE/RL's Turkmen Service in Lebap Province also reported on such a case. "One school director told me that at the beginning of this school year, he was told to take down a portrait of Niyazov and put a huge picture of Berdymukhamedov in its place," the correspondent says. "[He said] the order came from the Education Ministry's district department."

[Passage omitted: on Western media speculation about Berdymukhamedov's opening of the country.]

Bairam Shikhmuradov, an exiled opposition activist, says Berdymukhamedov should stop developing his personality cult, which he says could damage Turkmenistan's international reputation. "They have started to praise and flatter Berdymukhamedov as much as they did with Turkmenbashi. It looks ugly," Shikhmuradov says. "I hope the president will stop that and not let the situation go as far as it did under Niyazov. Taking into account the prospects of Turkmenistan's relations with the United States, China, and Russia, this nonsense with flattery, portraits, and open letters [of praise] to the president, will become an obstacle for him and his work."

b. Turkmen Villagers Skeptical of Government's Renovation Plans

Source: *Institute for War and Peace Report/Reporting Central Asia/02/28/80. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.*

Full version: http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=342992&apc_state=henprca

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has pledged a total of US \$4 billion to transform Turkmen villages into towns and improve their infrastructure, but Turkmen villagers are skeptical about the program's outcome, says the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) in its Reporting Central Asia bulletin February 28. The president issued a decree last month to grant urban status to the villages of Tejen, Serdar, Koneurgench, Anau, Baharly, and Gazachak, with populations ranging from 8,000 to 32,000. The Turkmen leader said in a November 2007 speech that he hoped to "bring the living conditions of our citizens up to European standards" by upgrading villages by 2020 with the help of foreign contractors.

IWPR staff in Central Asia interviewed a number of villagers who remained anonymous for reasons of safety. They found that Turkmen outside the capital of Ashgabat often live in primitive conditions, and have little faith in the president's efforts to improve what IWPR called the "dire state" and "atrocious" health standards of Turkmenistan's small towns. "The first thing that is evident is the terrible poverty everywhere," said one person interviewed. A teacher interviewed by IWPR in Goktepe, 45 miles outside the capital, said there is no pavement on the road, and people going to work are covered with dust. A textile plant in the town had gone bankrupt. Most people do not read newspapers or watch television. One woman interviewed was concerned that the latest round of construction might grind to a halt half-finished, as had occurred in the past in Goktepe, where 20 families received no new housing after losing their homes for the sake of a new airport. Under Niyazov, traditional one-storey homes were razed in favor of plate-glass high-rises, reports IWPR.

In Koneurgench in northern Turkmenistan, a member of *Medicins sans frontieres* (MSF) working to treat tuberculosis told IWPR that he was shocked by the "horrifying sanitary conditions" in a community without clean water or a working sewage system. "We had heard a lot about this old city dating back to the 11th century, and were looking forward to seeing the minarets and mausoleums," the doctor told IWPR. "We never expected such desolation, abandonment, underdevelopment and poverty," he said. "What first drew our attention in Koneurgench was the absence of well-fed people," the MSF doctor said. "They all seemed skinny and stooping, with dull, lifeless eyes," he continued. "There was a stench of feces everywhere in the streets because of the absence of a sewage system." Locals interviewed said poor conditions and unemployment were due to the government's lack of investment since independence and the failure to make repairs.

According to 2006 data from the World Health Organization, the infant mortality rate was nearly three times the average for the former Soviet region. Because state health care is poor and costly, women often give birth at home, which has led to a high rate of infant and maternal mortality.

A number of citizens expressed fears of corruption. A young man interviewed in Kaakhk told IWPR, "It's possible things will get done – but only as long as the money the president earmarks for building infrastructure in the small towns doesn't get stolen."

c. Turkmen Leader Replaces Prosecutor-General, Urges Military Reforms

Original title: *Turkmen Leader Replaces Prosecutor General*

Source: *BBC Monitoring—Central Asia/03/04/08/TV Altyn Asyn/03/03/08. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project*

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov has replaced the country's prosecutor general and chairman of the Supreme Court, BBC Monitoring reported, citing Turkmen TV. In a report on a Security Council session, the president strongly criticized Prosecutor General Muhammet Ogsukov for unspecified offenses by his subordinates and dismissed him.

"On the issue of prosecutor's offices, Muhammet, I have been telling you this for a long time that you have loosened control. The staff of the prosecutor's offices started abusing their office and pursuing their own interests. I warned you about this too. How many examples should I give you?," said the president in televised remarks

Chary Hojamyradov, chairman of the Supreme Court, was appointed as the new prosecutor general, with his role as top judge going to former head of the Central Ahali Regional Court Yaranmyrat Yazmyradov.

The president also spoke about the need for military reforms and improvement of soldiers' living conditions.

"People who cannot maintain their own army, will have to maintain someone else's," he said, citing a Turkmen proverb. The president instructed the defense minister to prepare a new military doctrine which will include reduction of the period of military service from 18 months to one year for those who have graduated from universities. The Turkmen leader also urged that the number of servicemen be reduced by providing more modern equipment to the armed forces and hiring contract personnel. He reiterated that Turkmenistan is a nuclear-free state and will not permit armed forces to handle weapons of mass destruction.

d. Army Officials Reprimanded by President for Poor Supply of Soldiers

Original title: *Officers in Charge of Turkmen Army Logistics Get Severe Reprimands*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/03/04/08. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12297&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: President Berdymukhamedov signed a resolution reprimanding to Gurbangeldy Temirov, deputy chairman of logistics for the State Border Service of Turkmenistan, for "serious shortcomings in provision of soldiers with food and uniforms," turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the presidential press service.

The president also signed a resolution reprimanding Deputy Defense Minister Seyydi Ovezguliev, formerly head of the main department for supplies and services. Both received warnings of imminent dismissal if they failed to improve their performance.

e. Turkmen National Security Minister Reprimanded for Lack of Oversight

Original title: *Turkmenistan National Security Chief Receives Severe Reprimand*

Source: turkmenistan.ru/03/06/08. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project

Full version: http://www.turkmenistan.ru/?page_id=3&lang_id=en&elem_id=12326&type=event&sort=date_desc

Synopsis: In his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Turkmenistan, President Berdymukhamedov issued a severe reprimand to National Security Minister Charymurtat Amanov on March 5 for failing to implement presidential assignments on the selection and training of military personnel, turkmenistan.ru reported, citing the presidential press service. Amanov was warned that he would be dismissed if he did not improve his work. Geldimet Orazov, head of the Mary regional department of the Ministry of National Security, was also reprimanded for lack of oversight of his staff and unspecified violations.

f. Amnesty International Report Recalls Forgotten Turkmen Political Prisoners

Original title: *Europe and Central Asia: Summary of Amnesty International's Concerns in the Region: July-December 2007: Turkmenistan*

Source: *Press release/Amnesty International/03/04/08*. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Synopsis: Amnesty International (AI), the global human rights organization, released its latest six-month world report (July-December 2007) on March 4, including a section on Turkmenistan. While some well-known cases of political prisoners have been resolved favorably – such as former mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah, who was pardoned; environmental activist Andrei Zatoka, who was tried and released; race horse breeder Geldy Kyarizov, freed a month before the end of his sentence; and Baptist Vyacheslav Kalataevsky, not permitted to travel abroad – others were still behind bars. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty journalist Ogulsapar Muradova died in custody in September 2006. AI confirmed that Annakurban Amanklychev and Sapardurdy Khadzhiyev, two Turkmenistan Helsinki Foundation activists who were arrested with Muradova, remain jailed on what appear to be fabricated charges related to their human rights activism. Their relatives were reportedly allowed to send food parcels to them for the first time in December 2007.

Former Speaker of Parliament Ovezgeldy Atayev, jailed shortly after the death of former President Saparmurat Niyazov in December 2006, was sentenced to 4 or 5 years of imprisonment in February 2007 and had been being held in the Ovadan-depe Prison as of November 2007, AI learned. His wife was also imprisoned in a women's labor colony in Dashoguz. In a power struggle following Niyazov's death, Atayev

was said to be targeted as the former leader's constitutionally designated successor. Two other figures associated with the Niyazov regime were also jailed. Akmurat Rejepov, former head of the Presidential Security Service and his son, Nurmurat Rejepov, were sentenced to 20 and 13 years' imprisonment respectively on charges of corruption and abuse of office in a closed trial. Numurat Rejepov was later included in the presidential pardon in October 2007.

Amnesty also reported that dozens of prisoners labelled "enemies of the people" and tried after the alleged assassination attempt on Niyazov in 2002 continue to be denied access to relatives, lawyers, and independent organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. Family members have been denied permission to write letters or send parcels and also have been unable to confirm whether the prisoners are still alive. However, one report received by AI indicated that all the prisoners had undergone a medical examination, and several who were reportedly ill were said to be released.

Six Jehovah's Witnesses who had become conscientious objectors were initially sentenced for draft evasion from July to December 2007, but then handed suspended sentences upon appeal. Two were subject to restrictions imposed on their travel and employment. At least three of these men had served previous terms for their refusal of military service. Some were told they could face drafting and imprisonment again when released if they persisted in their conscientious objection.

AI also reported that a "black list" of those barred from traveling abroad remains in place, although reduced in number under President Berdymukhamedov. Relatives of those formerly and currently imprisoned for financial crimes are among those in the list. Other groups frequently banned from traveling include critics of the government, religious minorities and their relatives, and relatives of those convicted for the alleged assassination attempt in 2002. On November 24, 2007, authorities prevented Svetlana Orazova and her daughter, age three, from boarding a plane leaving Ashgabat. Orazova is a dual Turkmen and Russian citizen and the sister of Khudayberdy Orazov, an exiled opposition figure sentenced in absentia to life imprisonment related to the 2002 events. She was informed by an official of the Turkmen Ministry of National Security that as long as her husband, Ovez Annaev, was abroad, she could not leave the country. Annaev, who had repeatedly asked for permission to travel abroad and been refused, was granted permission to fly to Moscow for medical treatment in May 2007. Orazova has appealed the denial of her travel abroad and has not yet heard a reply to her case, which was filed with the Citizen's Complaint Commission founded by President Berdymukhamedov last year.

g. Turkmen Women Receive \$10 Cash Gift on Women's Day from President

Original title: *On Eve of International Women's Day Women of Turkmenistan to Be Given Cash Gifts on Behalf of the president of Turkmenistan*

Source: Official Turkmen government website/03/02/08.

Electronic version: <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm/en/?idr=1&id=080302c>

In order to maintain ancient traditions of honoring women who are mothers and sisters, and highly appreciating their contribution to developing modern Turkmen society, strengthening the family, and raising the younger generation to love their motherland, and in order to celebrate International Women's Day, the president of Turkmenistan issued a resolution. The resolution authorizes the presentation on the president's behalf in a solemn ceremony a cash gift of 200,000 manat [US \$10--TP] to women working at enterprises, organizations, and state and private institutions, and to pensioners, women receiving state benefits, students, school-girls and kindergarteners.

3. ECONOMIC NEWS

a. TV Centers of Turkmenistan to Receive Equipment Worth US \$2.7 Million

Source: turkmenistan.ru/03/05/08. Synopsis prepared by OSI Turkmenistan Project.

Full version: <http://www.reuters.com/article/rbssEnergyNews/idUSL2637103020080226>

Synopsis: The Turkmen Ministry of Communication will sign a contract worth nearly \$2.7 million with a Cyprian company, Eurasia Trans B&PE, Ltd., for the purchase of modern television equipment for Turkmen TV, turkmenistan.ru reported. The equipment will be distributed to the station's regional branches as well as its central studio, as part of President Berdymukhamedov's plan to upgrade television equipment and improve the quality of programming. The purchase will include computers, spare parts for audio and video equipment, microwave and optical transmission equipment for live broadcasting of television programs.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations have been prepared by OSI's Turkmenistan Project.

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